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PTQ8339

RELEASED IN PART  
B1, 1.4(D)

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ACTION WHA-01

INFO	LOG-00	ACDA-08	ACDE-00	ACQ-01	CIAE-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00
	SRPP-00	DS-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	L-01	ADS-00
	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OMB-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00	P-00
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	DRL-02	G-00	SAS-00	/016W			

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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO USCINCSO MIAMI FL IMMEDIATE  
INFO SECSTATE WASHDC 3378

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 000770

FOR CINC FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 3/10/09  
TAGS: PREL, MARR, VE  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR YOUR VISIT TO VENEZUELA

REF: CARACAS 0745

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN F. MAISTO. REASON: 1.5 (D).

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WHAT YOU WILL FIND IN VENEZUELA  
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1. (C) YOUR VISIT TO VENEZUELA COMES AT AN ACTIVE AND DYNAMIC MOMENT IN THIS COUNTRY'S POLITICAL HISTORY. THE ANXIETY AND UNCERTAINTY WHICH HUNG OVER VENEZUELA DURING YOUR LAST VISIT--IN THE RUN-UP TO THE DECEMBER 6 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS--HAS BEEN REPLACED BY HOPEFULNESS THAT HUGO CHAVEZ AND HIS GOVERNMENT WILL EFFECT DRAMATIC POLITICAL CHANGE AND ADDRESS THE PRESSING SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NEEDS OF THE COUNTRY. (CHAVEZ'S POPULARITY IS IN THE 80 PERCENT RANGE.) NEVERTHELESS, THERE ARE VENEZUELAN, PARTICULARLY THOSE WHO WERE COMFORTABLE WITH THE FORMER POLITICAL/ECONOMIC ELITES, WHO ARE UNCOMFORTABLE WITH CHAVEZ'S FREE-WHEELING WAYS.

2. (C) THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT, LESS THAN TWO MONTHS AFTER TAKING OFFICE, HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED BY CONTINUITY OF ECONOMIC POLICY

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN  
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)  
DECLASSIFY AFTER: 11 MAR 2024  
DATE/CASE ID: 14 MAR 2007 200503244

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AND DRAMATIC, AGGRESSIVE ADVANCEMENT OF HIS POLITICAL AGENDA OF POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. REGARDING THE LATTER, CHAVEZ HAS CARRIED THE FIELD WITH HIS IDEA THAT A NEW CONSTITUTION IS NEEDED TO "RE-LEGITIMIZE" THE VENEZUELAN STATE. HE HAS SET A TIGHT TIMETABLE TO ACCOMPLISH THIS GOAL. HE HAS:

- CONVOKED A CONSULTATIVE REFERENDUM ON THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL FOR APRIL 25;
  - OPENED A NOMINATING PERIOD OF THIRTY DAYS FOR CANDIDATES FOR THE CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY, TO END ON MAY 25;
  - DECLARED A THIRTY-DAY ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN PERIOD, ENDING ON JUNE 25 (ELECTIONS WILL FOLLOW SHORTLY AFTER ON A DATE TO BE FIXED BY THE NATIONAL ELECTORAL COUNCIL);
  - SET JULY 5--VENEZUELAN INDEPENDENCE DAY--AS THE OPENING
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SESSION OF THE ASSEMBLY;

- EXPRESSED THE HOPE THAT THE ASSEMBLY WILL FINISH ITS WORK AND PRESENT A NEW CONSTITUTION TO THE VENEZUELAN PEOPLE BY JANUARY 5, 2000.

3. (C) CHAVEZ'S ASSERTIVE, AND SOMETIMES IMPULSIVE, LEADERSHIP STYLE HAS LED HIS ADVERSARIES TO ACCUSE HIM OF AUTOCRATIC AND AUTHORITARIAN AMBITIONS. MUCH OF THIS IS LEFTOVER ELECTION RHETORIC. HOWEVER, CHAVEZ, LIKE WATER, ONLY RECOGNIZES BOUNDARIES THAT ARE SET FOR HIM. THESE BOUNDARIES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED BY VENEZUELA'S DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS--WHICH ARE ALIVE AND WELL--AND CONSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE. CHAVEZ HAS RESPECTED THESE BOUNDARIES, ALTHOUGH HIS OWN SENSE OF URGENCY OFTEN SPILLS OVER INTO PUBLIC EXPRESSIONS OF FRUSTRATION AT THE SLOW PACE OF VENEZUELAN GOVERNMENT.

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CHALLENGES FACING CHAVEZ  
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4. (C) THE IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES FACING CHAVEZ AND VENEZUELA ARE TWO:

- GETTING THE GOVERNMENT UP AND RUNNING. CHAVEZ SKILLS AT ADVANCING A POLITICAL MESSAGE ARE NOT MATCHED BY ADMINISTRATIVE SKILLS. HE HAS BEEN SLOW IN HIS APPOINTMENTS, HAS NO EFFECTIVE COORDINATING MECHANISM TO KEEP HIS MINISTERS READING FROM THE SAME SCRIPT, AND HAS YET TO PROVIDE HIS MINISTERS THE AUTHORITY NECESSARY TO RUN THEIR MINISTRIES.

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-- ENGAGING AN ECONOMY IN DEEP CRISIS. CHAVEZ HAS DECIDED TO CONTINUE THE ECONOMIC POLICIES OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT, CONCERNED THAT DRAMATIC ECONOMIC MEASURES NOW WOULD OPEN HIM TO POLITICAL ATTACK AND UNDERMINE HIS AGENDA OF CONSTITUTIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE. WHILE POLITICALLY SAVVY, THIS DECISION POSTPONES BUT DOES NOT AVOID A DAY OF ECONOMIC RECKONING. A CRUMBLING ECONOMIC BASE, LOW OIL PRICES, AND LITTLE DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN INVESTMENT WILL SOON TRANSLATE INTO INADEQUATE REVENUES TO RUN GOVERNMENT, NO MONEY TO ADDRESS SOCIAL PROBLEMS, AND GROWING UNEMPLOYMENT.

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WHAT WE WANT FROM YOUR VISIT  
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7. (C) YOUR VISIT COMES AT A GOOD TIME TO DO THE FOLLOWING:

-- UNDERSCORE OUR SUPPORT FOR THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT AND OUR  
INTEREST IN DEEPENING THE RELATIONSHIP, ESPECIALLY IN SUCH AREAS  
AS COUNTERNARCOTICS AND ANTI-ORGANIZED CRIME COOPERATION;

-- CONTINUE TO BUILD ON OUR EXCELLENT MILITARY-TO-MILITARY  
RELATIONSHIP, AND HIGHLIGHT THE ROLE OF MINISTER OF DEFENSE RAUL  
SALAZAR IN THAT RELATIONSHIP;

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8. WE LOOK FORWARD TO SEEING YOU ON MONDAY.

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